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June 30, 1977

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## INTERAGENCY INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM\*

## A REVIEW OF GUATEMALAN ARMS PURCHASES AND MILITARY CAPABILITIES

## INTRODUCTION

1. Guatemalan President Laugerud recently ordered the mobilization of reserve forces and informed the US he is prepared to go to war over Belize if upcoming talks with the UK fail and the colony is granted independence. This interagency memorandum describes Guatemala's recently concluded and planned weapons purchases, compares Guatemalan capabilities to those of British forces in Belize, and examines the implications of this force improvement.

## I. OVERVIEW OF CURRENT FORCE LEVELS

## Recent Guatemalan Purchases

2. Since 1969 Guatemala has bought a wide variety of military equipment [redacted] Major acquisitions in the past two years include:

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[redacted] STOL transport aircraft [redacted]  
 [redacted] armored cars [redacted]  
 [redacted] 5.56-mm assault rifles [redacted]  
 [redacted] rounds of [redacted] ammunition [redacted]  
 [redacted] helicopters [redacted]  
 [redacted] C-47 transport aircraft [redacted]  
 [redacted] patrol boats [redacted]

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### Guatemalan Capabilities

3. The equipment Guatemala has recently purchased considerably improves that country's overall military capabilities. Guatemala has a small number of [redacted] armored vehicles [redacted] personnel carriers, as well as a marginally effective force of several halftracks [redacted]

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4. The Guatemalan air force can contribute to ground forces capabilities. The air force has 11 [redacted] ground-attack aircraft and two combat-capable T-33 trainers, [redacted] both types of plane offer a close air support capability. Moreover, Guatemalan forces can rely on [redacted] transport aircraft for para-drops. As many as 13 helicopters could be made available for airmobile operations.

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5. The Guatemalan navy is primarily a coastal defense force consisting chiefly of 13 patrol boats and one landing craft which could offer marginal support in an amphibious landing operation in Belize. The boats would be no match for a British frigate and could be utilized only in the absence of a frigate.

### Military Balance

6. Guatemalan forces enjoy a significant numerical superiority over British forces in Belize. The Guatemalans have a total of 13,355 men in their armed forces. [redacted]

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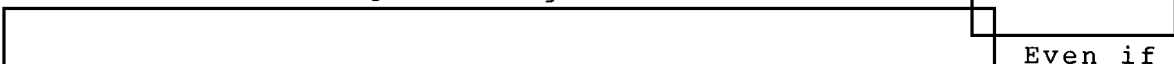
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8. The numerically superior Guatemalan forces display several weaknesses that limit their ability to conduct sustained military operations against Belize. High on the list of shortcomings are logistical constraints.



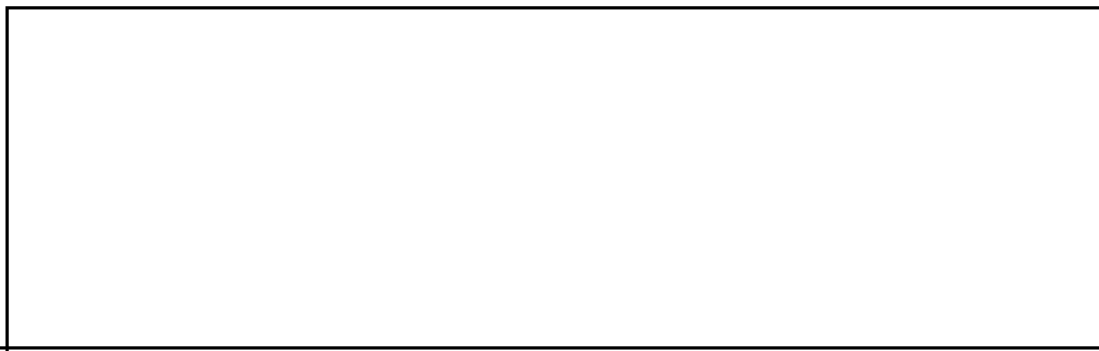
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Even if the Guatemalans procure additional weapons, long training periods will be needed for their troops to learn to man and maintain the equipment.

9. Moreover, shortcomings in command and control would also become apparent. Planners in Guatemala City would be hard pressed because of poor lines of communication to control effectively their forces operating in Belize at least 200 kilometers away. The rugged terrain in southern Belize would inhibit overland resupply operations.

## II. PLANNED ARMS PURCHASES

10. The Guatemalans are planning additional weapons purchases and have apparently approached several different foreign suppliers:



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12. Judging from previous and planned arms deals, we believe that Guatemalan military leaders have been content to buy relatively simple equipment rather than sophisticated weapons their forces could not effectively employ.

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### III. ASSESSMENT

13. Guatemala's recent modernization efforts have probably been undertaken with a Belize campaign in mind. On June 17 the Guatemalan Defense Minister, General Otto Spiegel, publicly stated that the country's armed forces have been preparing for the last seven years to recover what they consider Guatemalan national territory. Guatemala initiated some of the above-mentioned arms deals in the mid-1970s when tensions were running high over the status of Belize. Should anxiety over Belize continue, financial considerations would probably not deter military leaders from arms procurement.

14. In addition to the Belize issue, several other reasons probably account for the ongoing Guatemalan force improvement.

--The need to replace outdated equipment.

--Guatemala's wish not to be overshadowed militarily by any other Central American country. Recent weapons acquisitions by Honduras and El Salvador (stemming from their border dispute) have erased the former Guatemalan superiority and placed all three of these countries at approximate parity.

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--A long-standing insurgency problem that continues to preoccupy Guatemalan leaders. Many of the arms they are seeking, such as helicopters and small arms, are well suited for internal security roles.

15. Since counterinsurgency as well as a Belize campaign are both tasks for the ground forces, Guatemalan ground units would be the primary beneficiaries of the new weapons. The purchases of armored cars [ ] transports as well as the possible acquisition of vast amounts of ammunition all combine to increase the capabilities of the ground forces.

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16. Guatemala is diversifying its sources of military hardware to avoid dependence on one single country. This strategy has been increasingly evident for several years and the cancellation of US military aid programs in March 1977 added new impetus to the drive. While evidently ready to receive weapons [ ] before that time, Guatemala will not accept [ ] as long as there are preconditions concerning human rights. Moreover, Guatemalan planners complain of long delays in shipments [ ]

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17. Nor would purchases of Soviet weapons be welcome in Guatemala City. Given Guatemala's past orientation to [ ] and the anti-Soviet feelings of its conservative military officer corps, any agreement for Soviet weaponry is not likely--even on the favorable financial terms the Soviets have arranged with other recipients. While some Guatemalan leaders have raised the possibility of purchasing Soviet weapons, we view this generally as an emotional, vindictive reaction to US policy on military assistance.

18. In view of dim prospects for arms from either the US or the Soviet Union, Guatemala is turning increasingly toward Israel and Western European nations--particularly France, Belgium, and West Germany. We expect this trend to continue.

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